THE MOON SOCIETY

A Century of Achievement

1848—1948

By

Charles Thomas Burt

MOON WORKS
104 QUEEN'S ROAD
BRIGHTON

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AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

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OF THE

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND

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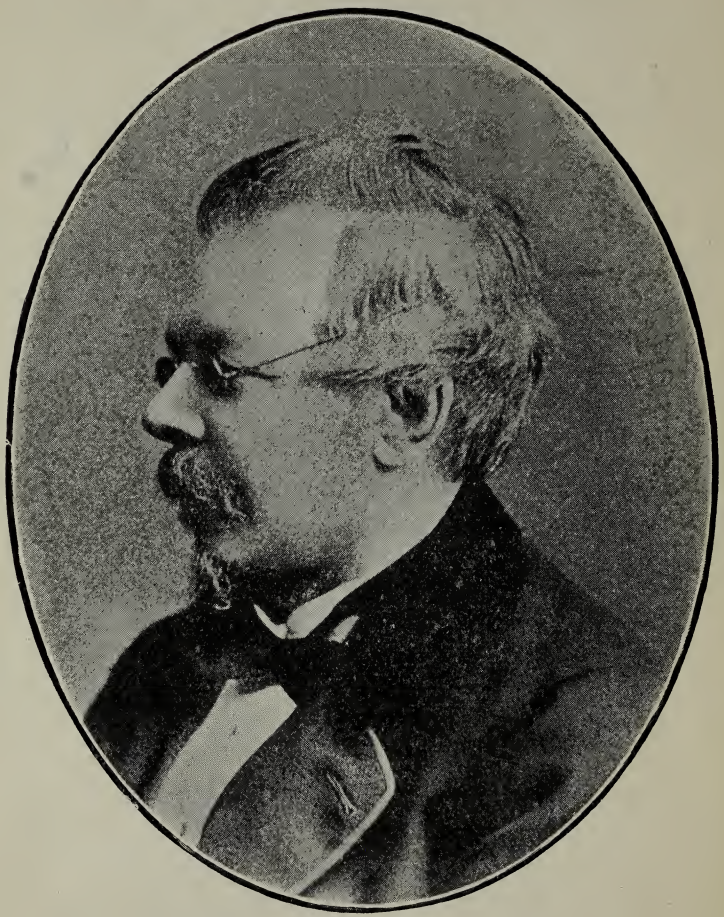

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A Simplified System of Embossed Reading

FOR THE USE OF THE BLIND

INVENTED BY THE LATE

William Moon, LL.D., &c.

Published by The Moon Society, 104 Queen's Road, Brighton, Sussex.

NOTE: THE DOTTED MARKS OF THE LETTERS PRINTED OVER THE EMBOSSED ALPHABET, SHOW WHAT PORTIONS OF THE COMMON LETTER ARE OMITTED, IN ORDER TO MAKE THE CHARACTERS OPEN & CLEAR TO THE TOUCH

A b C D E f G H I J K L M
N O R T U V W X Y Z
(AND) TH. THE
:G FOR ING :T FOR MENT :N FOR TION :S FOR NESS
DIVISION OF VERSES
EVEN NUMERALS 2 6 0 4 8
ODD NUMERALS 3 7 5 9
SHORT STOP
FULL STOP
A SIGN OF PARENTHESIS ( )
A MARK OF INTERROGATION ?
!

INSTRUCTIONS. IN TEACHING THE ALPHABET CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN TO EXPLAIN THE ALTERATIONS MADE IN THE LETTERS, AS INDICATED BY THE DOTTED LINES, (SEE THE NOTE ABOVE THE ALPHABET). THE FIRST LINE OF READING IS READ FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, AND THE SECOND FROM RIGHT TO LEFT, THE BRACKETS CONDUCTING THE FINGER FROM LINE TO LINE. WORDS ENDING IN ING, MENT, TION, AND NESS, HAVE THE LAST LETTER PUT FOR THE WHOLE SYLLABLE, AS :G FOR ING, :T FOR MENT, &C. TWO DOTS, ONE ABOVE THE OTHER GIVING NOTICE OF THE CONTRACTION. THE FIRST LETTERS OF LORD, GOD, JESUS, AND CHRIST, ALWAYS STAND FOR THOSE HOLY NAMES. TWO DOTS SIDE BY SIDE ARE USED FOR A FULL STOP, A SINGLE DOT FOR ANY SHORTER STOP. VERSES ARE DIVIDED BY TWO SHORT LINES ONE ABOVE THE OTHER. THE MARK OF INTERROGATION PRECEDES THE QUESTION TO WHICH IT REFERS.

— STANDS FOR TH & THE.

I. THE FOUNDER AND HIS WORK

Rather more than a century ago, Louis Braille, a blind Frenchman, invented the embossed type which bears his name, and in so doing, opened to countless blind people throughout the world, the treasures of literature and music. But because Braille type is not easily learned by those who lose their sight in later life or have hands hardened and made insensitive by manual labour, many blind men and women in Britain, the British Commonwealth and the United States, owe a debt of gratitude to another blind inventor of embossed type—Dr. William Moon.* When he printed his first sheet of raised characters on a wooden hand-press in his house at Brighton in 1847, he kindled a torch which was to give continual light to thousands of his blind fellow men.

He was born in 1818, and lost his sight in early manhood. He had hoped to take Holy Orders, but owing to his blindness gave up the idea of ordination, and resolved henceforth to make the welfare of the blind his life-work. Having mastered the various systems of reading for the blind which were then in use, he proceeded to teach a few young people in their own homes, and subsequently formed a class. His pupils ranged in age from three to thirty (some of the younger ones later formed the nucleus of the Brighton School for Blind Boys) and tried to teach them to read, using a stenographic system of embossed type, devised by a Mr. Frere.

John Rutherford, who wrote " William Moon and his Work for the Blind," quotes extensively from Dr. Moon's own notes of his life, and one unpublished volume of autobiographical material is in the Library of the National Institute for the Blind. It gives a vivid picture of this young blind man, deeply religious, with a simple evangelical faith that sustained him against heavy odds. He had married young, and his wife kept a shop to augment the " salary " (five shillings a week at first, and later seven

*William Moon was given the Hon. degree of LL.D. in 1871 by the University of Philadelphia in recognition of his work for the blind.

shillings and sixpence) which he earned by teaching his little class. Here is a characteristic entry: " About this time " (soon after the birth of their second child) " my landlord came and told me that he must raise my rent sixpence per week. I told him I would lay it before the Lord, beseeching Him to aid me in these trying circumstances. The following week, before the additional rent became due, an extra half crown was added to my salary, which made ten shillings a week."

The fact that Dr. Moon's pupils varied so much in age probably rendered his task specially difficult, and they made but little progress. He soon found that most of them were unable to decipher the characters or to memorise a series of contractions, so he began in 1845 to devise an easier system, in which the letters were very simple in outline, combined with full orthography. Most of the characters were either the unaltered or slightly modified forms of the Roman letter. " By it," he writes in his diary, " a lad who had in vain for five years endeavoured to learn to read by the other systems could in ten days read easy sentences."

In June, 1847, he issued his first booklet, " The Last Days of Polycarp," followed a month later by " The Last Hours of Cranmer." An urgent demand was then received for portions of the Bible, and this caused him to consider the problem of making stereotyped plates, from which copies could be printed whenever required. The difficulties he encountered were many, but eventually, working far into the night, he met with complete success, producing a plate of tinned sheet iron on which the characters of tinned copper wire, cut and shaped by special tools, were fixed. The first wooden printing press, after several breakdowns, was replaced by an iron Albion one.

In these early days, Dr. Moon carried on the work in his own house, and during this time he was visited by the Duchess of Gloucester, who, he tells us, " spoke with many tears " of the blindness of her father, George III, and of one of her sisters, saying what comfort Moon type might have brought to them, had it been devised a few years earlier.

The stereotyping of the New Testament was begun in September, 1848, and Dr. Moon appealed for funds to

finish this great task. The Bible was completed ten years later, in December, 1858. In 1856 a small workshop was erected adjacent to Dr. Moon's house, at 104 Queen's Road, Brighton, the foundation stone being laid by Sir Charles Lowther, himself blind; he became Moon's warm friend, and assisted him with great generosity.

Printing, however, did not occupy all Dr. Moon's time and energy, for he was a pioneer in another field. In 1855 the London Home Teaching Society was formed for the purpose of teaching the blind in their homes, and in this work, Dr. Moon found an energetic colleague in a Miss Graham. Together they visited throughout days that began at nine in the morning and often did not end till twelve hours later. They also started a little workshop for the blind in a disused Chapel in Lambeth, but difficulties arose owing to accumulation of stock, and the venture was discontinued. During these years, Dr. Moon travelled extensively throughout the British Isles and was responsible for encouraging the formation of eighty provincial home teaching societies and free lending libraries of books in Moon type, especially in Yorkshire, where, with the help of Sir Charles Lowther a large number of books were provided to form the nucleus of such libraries.

Soon after its invention, the Moon system was adapted to other languages, Irish being the first, and one of the Chinese vernaculars the second. By 1880, the alphabets of 194 foreign languages, together with selections of Scripture, were available for the use of missionaries. Larger portions were embossed whenever required. In 1858 and on several subsequent occasions, Dr. Moon travelled with his son Robert through Holland and parts of Germany, to interest the institutions for the blind in his system. In 1860 he took a printing press and the necessary materials to Rotterdam to enable the School for the Blind there to print its own books: "Before we retired to rest that night," he writes, "it was set up and a page embossed —the first printed with my type in a foreign land." He visited France in 1861 and 1862, and further journeys were made in the United Kingdom from time to time, to ascertain the progress of the work of the home teaching societies.

In 1870 a few books were sent out to the United States, and later, two thousand volumes were generously presented by Sir Charles Lowther to New York for distribution to the principal cities. Libraries were also sent to Canada and Australia.

In the official report of " Moon's Institution for Embossing and Circulating the Holy Scriptures and Other Useful Books " for 1880, Dr. Moon gave a brief account of his work from 1847 to 1880, stating that thirty thousand plates had been stereotyped and 123,339 volumes embossed and circulated. In addition to the Bible, the list contained other devotional literature, biography, poetry, stories and a few educational books, as well as many volumes in foreign languages.

By this time, Dr. Moon had conveyed the premises and printing plant into the hands of Trustees, who included —in addition to Dr. Moon himself and his daughter Adelaide —Sir Charles Lowther, Lord Mount Temple and the Right Hon. James Lowther.

In 1882, Dr. Moon and his daughter made an extensive tour of America, and as a result of his visit, free lending libraries were established in Philadelphia (where his son was later to become Secretary of the Pennsylvania Home Teaching Society), Boston, Chicago and Pittsburg. His visit was also probably in part responsible for the fact that soon after his return to England the U.S. Legislature passed a bill removing the duty on all embossed books for the blind imported into the United States.

In the following year, a gift of £2,000 from Gardner's Trust for the Blind made possible a further extension of the Brighton premises and purchase of plant, and four years later, a Royal Commission appointed to consider the condition of the blind, visited the Moon Works, expressed its interest in the work done, and took evidence from Dr. Moon.

In 1890, Dr. Moon, now 71, celebrated his Jubilee, and in recognition of his fifty years of service to the blind, was presented with a chiming clock, a purse containing £250 and an illuminated address, from admirers throughout the country. Brighton was justly proud of her blind

citizen, and the Brighton newspapers gave considerable space to an account of the proceedings: " Dr. Moon is a very active, clever man," writes one paper, " who does not look anything like his age. He is always singularly cheerful and happy, and never for a moment idle. He is full of new ideas."

Two years later he was obliged to give up the greater part of his work, but he still continued to address meetings of the blind held each Sunday at the Brighton Town Hall and did so till the last Sunday of his life. He died on October 10th, 1894, and words spoken by him shortly before his death were characteristic: " It has been for me a long night, but a bright day." In the same year, Sir Charles Lowther, whom he described as " kind patron and friend," and who had been the greatest benefactor of the Moon Society during its early struggles, also died at the age of ninety.

For the next twenty years, the Society's work was carried on by Miss Adelaide Moon, with the assistance of her brother, Dr. Robert C. Moon, now settled in the United States. During this period three noteworthy events were recorded. In 1903 the British and Foreign Bible Society, which, in the past had contributed generously towards the cost of embossing various portions of the Scriptures in English and in other languages, agreed to meet half the cost of any future issues. In 1905, Gardner's Trust for the Blind once again bore the cost of a new embossing press, and in the same year the monthly " Moon Magazine " was first published under the editorship of Dr. R. C. Moon; it has continued, without interruption, for over forty years.

Early in 1914, however, Dr. Moon's son died at Philadelphia, and shortly afterwards, Miss Adelaide Moon, now in her seventieth year, approached the Council of the National Institute for the Blind, with a view to making the Moon Society a branch of the Institute. For a time, however, the outbreak of war in August, 1914, caused a suspension of the negotiations, and before anything further could be done, Miss Moon herself died on November 12th, thus severing the last link with the family. At the time of her death there were 112,000 stereotyped plates in use, and 321,000 volumes and booklets had been produced.

II. THE MOON SOCIETY AS A BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND

The Council of the National Institute for the Blind now reopened negotiations with the only surviving Trustee, Mr. Gerald Loder, M.P., and as a result, the following new Trustees were appointed: The National Institute for the Blind, Mr. (later Sir) Arthur Pearson, Dr. Washington Ranger and the Rev. Hugh Shearer of Brighton. The management of the Moon Society was undertaken by the National Institute, though the production of the books was to be carried on at 104 Queen's Road, Brighton, as hitherto. As a branch of the National Institute for the Blind, a new era in the history of the Moon Society began, the printing works were put into thorough order, and facilities were provided for an increased output. During the year 1915, a grant of £650 was made by the Institute, and 4,000 book plates and 9,453 volumes and pamphlets produced. This output was maintained in the following year, when a grant of £1,100 was made. In 1917, 5,347 book plates were made, and the Institute's grant was £1,750.

Owing to the increasing demands for Moon literature, it was decided in 1918 to increase the output still further, and in the period from January 1st, 1919, to March 31st, 1921, no fewer than 21,634 book-plates, 18,316 volumes and 30,146 pamphlets were produced. Grants received from the National Institute amounted to nearly £6,000.

In 1923, it became apparent that a cheaper and quicker method of meeting the ever-growing demand for new books was necessary. The additional cost of preparing vast quantities of plates, of which there were over eighty tons in stock, which, after the original printing, might only be occasionally required, did not justify the cost and the difficulties of storage. That the 2,000 plates used for the 23 volumes of " David Copperfield " weighed two tons is a striking example of what was involved. A policy of printing Limited Editions direct from type was, therefore, decided upon, due notice of any proposed publication being given some months prior to publication. An account

of the process of printing is given in the Appendix to this pamphlet on page 15.

The Moon Newspaper (published weekly) was first printed in 1924, and its issue to over 450 readers has continued without interruption; it gives a summary of the news of the week both at home and abroad. " The Moon Magazine," which is a monthly periodical, has increased its circulation from 100 to 380 (actually it reaches a much wider circle of readers, as it is passed from one to another). It consists of fiction and articles of general interest. " The Moon Messenger," a religious periodical ably edited by Canon A. Wellesley-Orr, is now in its ninth year. A comparative newcomer to the monthlies, " The Light of the Moon " is made up of articles written in very simple English and short words, suitable for the beginner in Moon; it was first published in January, 1939. The quarterly " Moon Rainbow," which caters for the deaf-blind, was begun in 1932 and the bi-monthly devotional booklet, " The Torch," in 1936.

Up to 1931 the production of Moon type was carried on only in England, but in that year the United States Congress granted an annual appropriation of $100,000 for the purchase of books in embossed types by the Library of Congress for distribution to libraries, and plant was adapted by the Braille Institute of America, Los Angeles, for the purpose of producing books in the Moon system. The late Mr. W. G. Holmes, Editor of the Braille " Matilda Ziegler Magazine," produced a Moon edition.

In 1931 also, the Secretary-General of the National Institute for the Blind, Mr. W. McG. Eagar, C.B.E., who was attending the World Conference on Work for the Blind at New York, visited the Moon Libraries in America and Canada, with which there had been no personal contact for some years, and invited them to appoint four directors to a Board of Directors. The first meeting of the Board was held in London in 1934, when discussions took place on proposed changes in the Moon system, including the abolition of the return line (Moon is read alternatively from left to right and from right to left) the use of a new system of numerals in place of the Arabic forms and the adoption

of a few additional simple contractions and abbreviations to form Grade 2 Moon.

A further meeting of the Board was held in New York in 1937, when Mr. Eagar happened to be again in America on business relating to the blind and could represent the British Directors. Meanwhile, the proposed changes in the system had been submitted to the readers of Moon, and it was decided, as a result of their findings, to retain the return line, to adopt the new form of numerals and to continue further tests in the use of Grade 2. In the following year, at a third Meeting of Directors held in London, the gradual adoption of Grade 2 was approved.

The interests of the reader have always been in the forefront of the policy of the Moon Society. To-day a plentiful supply of fiction is available, many classics have been retold as short stories, letters, prayers, hymns, etc. have been prepared for personal use, and playing cards supplied. In 1927, a scheme to supply copies of the Collects, Epistles and Gospels, with the Prayer Book version of the Psalms, was carried out, week by week, throughout the year, and, for a nominal sum, over one hundred readers benefited.

In December, 1936, a Christmas Annual in Moon type consisting of a large volume of short stories, was presented to 700 readers, and in the following year, further gifts were made to readers, including 500 copies of the B.B.C. book of prayers, " New Every Morning," in two volumes, 350 copies of " Tales of Detection " in Grade 2 Moon, and 150 copies of Arthur Bryant's " National Character." The Christmas Annuals of 1937 and 1938 were distributed to 2,000 readers, including a number in the Dominions and in the United States. During the war, the issues for 1939 and 1940 were limited to 1,000 copies, half of which were distributed to readers overseas.

With the increase of elderly people anxious to learn to read, resultant on the steadily improving facilities for home teaching, a need was felt for instruction books in Moon, and in 1931, Miss Hilda Bradfield, herself a home teacher of wide experience, prepared a set of graduated exercises entitled " Moon Made Easy." Ten thousand

copies have been sold in the past fifteen years. A graduated series of " Tales for Adults in Short Words " in three booklets and three volumes, was later undertaken by her, and both teachers and pupils are indebted to her for the skilful way in which they were produced.

Of recent years, Moon has been regarded by many as a stepping stone to Braille, and a useful booklet, " A Key to Braille in Moon," was prepared by Mr. W. P. Merrick in 1927; it is a unique production of which 750 copies have been sold, and it gives the Moon and Braille alphabets and exercises, one above the other.

During the war-years, production proceeded steadily although at a much smaller rate owing to shortage of staff and temporary hold-ups of material, but conditions have improved in the last year and will no doubt continue to get better.

The want of an appliance to emboss Moon type by hand has always been apparent, and in 1908 a typewriter was invented for this purpose, but owing to its high cost and slowness of operating, it did not prove of much practical use. Recently, further consideration has been given to the matter, and there is now in existence a small machine for embossing dotted outlines on a strip of paper, which can be used for correspondence. The Moon character, on account of its varied shapes, and the considerable pressure needed to emboss its continuous outlines, presents mechanical difficulties, but experiments to improve on this model are continuing.

From the end of 1914 to the present time, the production of the Moon Society has been 286,000 pages of type set, and over one million volumes and booklets. Hundreds of copies of the Bible, which is in fifty-eight volumes, have been supplied to Libraries and to readers at home and abroad. The Lord's Prayer and portions of Scripture are available in 419 languages and dialects. During the past twenty years, from the inauguration of the Limited Edition policy, 319 titles totalling 1,888 volumes of fiction, devotional works, biography, essays and *belles lettres,* travel and adventure, drama, verse, history and science have issued from the Moon Press, to be placed on the shelves of Moon

lending libraries in Britain, the British Commonwealth and the United States.

Despite such amenities as wireless and the Talking Book, the demand for Moon books does not slacken, and indeed, continues to grow. A hundred years has elapsed since Dr. Moon, to use his own words, " did his best to use the talent of blindness " for his fellows and it is likely that for many years to come, the elderly blind will benefit by the work of this courageous blind man, who, with little to help him at the outset, save his ability, energy, enthusiasm and serene religious faith, was able to do so much.

Appendix—THE METHOD OF PRINTING

In 1923, when the policy of printing Limited Editions, referred to on page 10, was adopted, a fount of hard cast brass types costing £500 was purchased; it weighed half-a-ton and was sufficient to set eighteen plates. Lead types had been used hitherto for flong-making, but these were too soft for the new method. The fount of hard cast brass type is nearing the end of its life, and instead of its replacement it has been decided to return to the policy of plate-making. A machine is now being built that will stamp the characters on a thin zinc plate. The success of this project is eagerly anticipated and the first task to be undertaken will be the making of a new set of 4,700 plates of our best seller, the Bible, as most of these plates are worn out.

Details of the Moon fount for typesetting may be of interest. Several of the types, which are type-high, are on square bodies, so that four characters can be made by turning the type in various positions; others, on square or narrower bodies, will make two characters, and some only one. Fourteen types are required to make the alphabet and twelve other types are used for the contractions and punctuation marks. There are six kinds of spaces, varying in thickness from the " one " space to the " six " or square space, three-eighths inch wide. These are higher than those used for letterpress printing, as they must be as high as the shoulder of the types on which the letter is cast, to ensure perfect embossing.

The frame, or bench, on which the typesetting is done consists of an upright case with divisions in which the types are neatly piled on their sides. The bottom row contains the vowels A E I O U, the second B J H N P Q, the third R S & T TH, and the top the other characters. On either side of the bench-top are horizontal compartments to hold the spaces, and between these a steel frame or chase rests on a mahogany board. The types are set directly into the chase, and between each line a thin brass rule is set to separate the next. The " three " space is

inserted between words and at the end of lines, to indicate completed words. The "one" spaces are used, if necessary, to fill out the lines. There are about 900 letters and spaces in a Moon page measuring 12 by 10 inches, and these can be set by an experienced type-setter in half an hour. The page of type, or forme, weighs fifty pounds. After the required number of copies has been printed, the page is returned to the frame, and distributed back into the case by a blind operator, but the borders, containing the guide lines, are left standing. To the end of March, 1945, 218,000 pages were set up with the brass types and millions of sheets printed from it with a rubber matrix. Although many of the original book plates are still in use, those of the "wire letter" type frequently lose some of the characters, and the stereotyped plates are becoming very brittle with age, and the pressure of the machine, and will eventually have to be scrapped. No stereotyping has been done since 1925. In that year, further improvements of the plant were effected, in order to cheapen production. One embossing press, hitherto used for plates, was converted for printing with the new brass type, and a mechanical drier, with endless chains, travelling over a gas-heated hot-plate, superseded the original half-dozen wooden racks in which the wet embossed sheets had been placed and wheeled into the open air during fine weather to dry. Guard-bending, book-sewing and wire-stitching machines were installed, and a bending machine, for creasing the new style of cheaper binding in presspahn boards, was provided.

During the peak years 1932-34, when considerable orders were received from the Library of Congress, the plant was taxed to the utmost, and further developments were necessary. An extension to the premises was made, a new embossing press costing £500, and a second 24-foot gas-heated drier installed. This duplicate plant can now turn out more than 10,000 embossed sheets daily.

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